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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet Military Doctrine for
Night Operations

1. Soviet military doctrine, tactical and strategic, emphasizes the advantages of surprise. To this end the Soviets devote much attention to the planning and conduct of operations during periods of poor visibility, particularly at night. Commanders at all echelons are expected to train their units to be proficient in the employment of the special techniques and equipment necessary for successful night operations.

2. During World War II, the Soviets used darkness and fog primarily for troop movements, preparations for large-scale daylight attacks, construction of field fortifications and supply operations. Night operations usually consisted of attacks in strength of up to a regiment, reconnaissance in force, and raids. Tanks were regarded as dawn-to-dusk weapons.

3. Current Soviet doctrine emphasizes that operations at night are to be considered a normal phase of combat which provides maximum opportunity for achieving surprise and reducing losses from enemy fire. Full offensives including tank units may be initiated at night or an offensive begun during daylight is expected to maintain momentum beyond night-fall.

4. The Field Service Regulations of the USSR Armed Forces--the field "bible" for division and regimental commanders--has a section providing detailed guidance for the conduct of night offensive operations.

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This section states in part:

"Extensive use should be made of night conditions to conduct offensive operations with decisive aims. A night offensive facilitates the delivery of surprise strikes and the continuity of combat operations. It also makes countermeasures more difficult for the enemy...The success of combat operations at night depends on thorough planning and on the training of troops, and also on the skillful handling of night vision devices and illumination equipment."

Generally, the Soviets expect all commanders to be alert at night and to capitalize on the physiological and psychological effects of darkness.

5. The Soviets recognize that the skills necessary for the effective conduct of night operations can only be attained by constant training. Soviet units are known to conduct realistic night training exercises at all levels. Soviet military publications frequently publish articles discussing night training and operational techniques or praising units which have demonstrated proficiency. For example, Military Herald, the major unclassified journal for combined-arms commanders, had an article in its November 1965 issue titled "Training in Night Firing." This article praised and described in detail the training in night firing techniques conducted by a motorized infantry company.

6. Soviet night combat doctrine emphasizes the employment of illumination and night vision devices by friendly forces and restricting enemy use of such equipment. The Soviet ground forces are now equipped to overcome the lack of visibility at night and to detect and counter enemy use of infrared equipment. At present, however, Soviet infrared night vision equipment in the field is not much more sophisticated than that which was available to US and German forces at the end of World War II. On the other hand, Soviet forces are widely equipped with night vision devices. Infrared vision, driving, and aiming aids are mounted as standard equipment on Soviet tanks and some other vehicles. Passive infrared detection equipment has been issued to Soviet field forces down to squad level.

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7. The Soviets also plan extensive use of search-lights, illuminating artillery shells, and signal and identification devices. According to the field regulations, "Aircraft...are brought in to create lighted reference points in enemy positions and to illuminate his most important targets." To aid in the concealment of Soviet forces, the regulations state: "In addition to its usual tasks, artillery destroys enemy radio-technical means and night vision equipment."

8. In addition to training of personnel and supplying them with the equipment necessary for night operations the Soviets have demonstrated a determination to develop more sophisticated night vision equipment for their field forces. Beginning with the German equipment and scientists captured during World War II, the Soviets launched an intensive developmental program that continues to the present.

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